

EPA'S OFFICE OF COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

ISSUE SUMMARY:

The Office of Community Revitalization (OCR), in the Office of Policy, works in communities to support locally led, community-driven strategies that improve economic development and environmental and human health outcomes. OCR provides technical assistance to economically distressed communities, including Opportunity Zones, to help foster economic growth and environmental protection. Opportunity Zones are economically distressed communities that have been formally created by governors across the country. The Administrator has charged OP with leading the agency's implementation of the Executive Order 13853 on Opportunity Zones. This work supports EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment because how and where communities build affects land, air, water, and public health. Helping communities to reuse existing buildings and infrastructure and revitalize neighborhoods brings economic and quality of life benefits while also using resources wisely, preserving undeveloped farmland and open space, and reducing pollution.

UPCOMING MILESTONES:

Early in 2021, OCR plans to offer additional rounds of technical assistance to up to 35 communities.

BACKGROUND:

Helping States, Tribes, and Communities. OCR's technical assistance programs help states, tribes, and municipalities identify and implement solutions to promote revitalization and entrepreneurship, improve access to health care and healthy food, create the housing and transportation choices their residents and businesses demand, and better prepare themselves for future economic and environmental challenges. For example, our Local Foods, Local Places Program helps partner communities invest in existing neighborhoods by developing local food systems. Our Recreation Economy for Rural Communities Program helps communities develop an action plan to revitalize their Main Streets by taking advantage of their outdoor recreation assets.

Meeting Current and Emerging Challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting economic and social life for much of 2020. We are working with communities and other partners to help plan an environmentally sustainable, equitable recovery that will better prepare communities of all sizes for future challenges, including economic changes (both short-term shocks and longer-term trends), extreme weather and natural disasters, and health threats. Some of the multi-benefit strategies we employ to make communities healthier, more resilient, and prosperous include:

- Promoting green spaces and walkable streets where people can safely get fresh air and exercise while socially distancing.
- Encouraging economic diversification that considers potential future economic and climate conditions.
- Identifying and supporting local economic drivers of the 21st century economy, including local agriculture, outdoor recreation, healthcare facilities, and other place-based assets.
- Resilience planning to keep people safer in natural disasters.

Making the Federal Government More Efficient and Effective. For many years, OCR has coordinated with federal agencies, including HUD, DOT, USDA, Commerce, NOAA, FEMA, and GSA, to help spend federal money more efficiently and effectively by doing the following:

- Help communities identify the federal programs that best meet their needs. We engage federal agency partners in our technical assistance projects based on what is most useful to the community. Frequent partners include HUD, DOT, USDA, SBA, and others. These representatives help local officials connect with assistance from their agencies.

- Help agencies ensure their investments are reinforcing prior public investments. New investment in infrastructure can benefit communities and businesses most when it is aligned with local goals and plans and when it helps achieve multiple benefits. We have worked with agencies to help them determine where their investments might be inadvertently encouraging sprawl that will cost communities more in the long run.

Providing Tools and Resources

We develop tools and publications on a wide variety of topics based on what we learn from our technical assistance work, partnerships, and research. Recent tools were developed to help communities do the following:

- Promote local food industries to spur revitalization and improve healthy eating choices;
- Plan for resilience to natural disasters;
- Change local zoning and related policies to better prepare for and adapt to climate change;
- Create an economic development plan around distinctive, place-based assets;
- Plan strategically for new investment to revitalize economically distressed neighborhoods; and
- Assess economic vulnerability to climate change and develop economic resilience.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input type="checkbox"/> Media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Federal Agency |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Governments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (name of stakeholder): Communities, regional entities | | | |

MOVING FORWARD:

In 2021, OCR will:

- Work with communities to help them recover from the economic effects of the pandemic by identifying and supporting local economic drivers, such as local food systems, outdoor recreation, healthcare facilities, and other place-based assets, for a thriving 21st century economy that is good for the environment, human health, and social equity.
- Continue conducting technical assistance projects virtually until it is safe to do so in person. We plan to offer new rounds of technical assistance in early 2021.

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OP

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: BROWNFIELDS, OEJ, OW, REGIONS